

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A self-checkout system comprising:

a self-checkout station configured for customer-operated self-checkout of items for purchase;

a mobile data terminal comprising a wireless network interface and a biometric data sensor; and

a controller operatively coupled to the mobile terminal and to the self-checkout station, said controller being configured to send data over a wireless network to the mobile terminal instructing the mobile terminal to initiate a biometric data capture operation, said biometric data capture operation being related to a self-checkout transaction.

10 2. The system of claim 1 wherein:

the self-checkout station is one of a plurality of self-checkout stations and the mobile terminal is operatively coupled to the plurality of self-checkout stations;

the data sent to the mobile terminal to initiate the biometric data capture comprises data identifying at least one self-checkout station for which biometric data capture is to be performed.

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3. The system of claim 1 wherein the biometric data sensor comprises a sensor selected from the group consisting of a fingerprint sensor, an iris recognition scanner, and a voice recognition device.

4. The system of claim 1 wherein the biometric data capture operation comprises receiving fingerprint attribute data at a fingerprint sensor.
 5. The system of claim 4, wherein:
 - the controller is a shared controller operatively coupled to each of the plurality of checkout stations; and
 - the controller is configured to administer biometric data capture for multiple ones of the plurality of self-checkout stations.
 6. The system of claim 4 wherein the biometric data capture operation further comprises input of a date of birth.
- 10 7. The system of claim 6 wherein the controller is configured to query a database using the date of birth as a key to retrieve a plurality of candidate age verification records, each record associating the date of birth with biometric attribute data characterizing a customer fingerprint previously captured at a fingerprint sensor.
8. The system of claim 4 wherein:
 - 15 the controller is one of a plurality of controllers;
 - each self-checkout station comprises a co-located one of the plurality of controllers; and
 - each of the controllers is operatively coupled to the data terminal.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein:

the mobile data terminal is one of a plurality of supervisory terminals;
a first one of the supervisory terminals is operatively coupled to the controller by a
wireless data network; and
5 a second one of the supervisory terminals is operatively coupled to the controller by a
wired data network.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein the mobile data terminal is a battery operated mobile
supervisory device.

11. The system of claim 4, wherein:

10 the mobile data terminal and the controller interoperate to perform a plurality of
supervisory functions associated with customer self-checkout at the checkout station;
the supervisory functions comprise processing of a payment transaction.

12. The system of claim 11, wherein:

the payment transaction comprises a payment type selected from the group consisting of
15 a credit card payment, a debit card payment, and an electronic funds transfer
payment; and
processing the payment transaction further comprises receiving a signature input at the
mobile data terminal.

13. A method for self-checkout of items that are sold on a restricted basis, the method comprising:
- following scanning of an item by a self-checkout customer, retrieving from a database a record indicating whether the scanned item is a restricted item;
- 5 when the item is a restricted item, verifying a characteristic of the customer, said verifying comprising:
- receiving a target data input at a biometric sensor, the target data characterizing a biometric feature of the customer;
- retrieving from a database a plurality of candidate records, each of said
- 10 records comprising biometric attribute data associated with a different one of a plurality of customers;
- comparing the target data to the biometric attribute data in the plurality of records to identify a matching record;
- when a matching record is identified, based on the matched record,
- 15 determining whether said item sold on a restricted basis can be sold to the customer.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein:
- said restricted basis comprises an age restriction;
- verifying further comprises receiving from the customer a date of birth; and
- 20 retrieving the plurality of candidate records comprises querying based on the date of birth to retrieve the plurality of records.

15. The method of claim 13 further comprising:

generating a signal indicating a need for supervisory assistance when a matching record cannot be identified.

16. The method of claim 15 further comprising:

5 in response to the signal indicating a need for supervisory assistance, initiating an exception process whereby input is received from a store attendant to cause a new database record to be generated, said new database record enabling automated age verification of said customer during subsequent purchase transactions.

17. A method of processing input at a supervisory terminal in a self-checkout system using a

10 handheld supervisory device, the method comprising:

at a self-checkout station,

generating a supervisory request signal indicating that input of customer biometric data is required to further the processing of a self-checkout transaction by a customer,

15 transmitting the supervisory request signal to a handheld supervisory device, said handheld device comprising a biometric sensor; and

at the handheld supervisory device,

receiving the supervisory request signal,

presenting a prompt alerting a user of the handheld device that input of customer biometric data is necessary;

receiving customer biometric data at the biometric sensor; and

transmitting the biometric data to the self-checkout station.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the biometric sensor comprises a fingerprint sensor.